

Introduction

What has this Light Witnessed?

Lighthouse keepers lived on rocky Southeast Farallon Island from 1855 to 1972. They kept the light burning, the steam foghorn ready to blast, and the wind-blown station in good repair. Most brought their wives and children, as did third Assistant Keeper Kaneen in 1904. This lesson explores the life of the families who kept watch over the lighthouse during its early days.



Source: San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, 03.07.G1.01.
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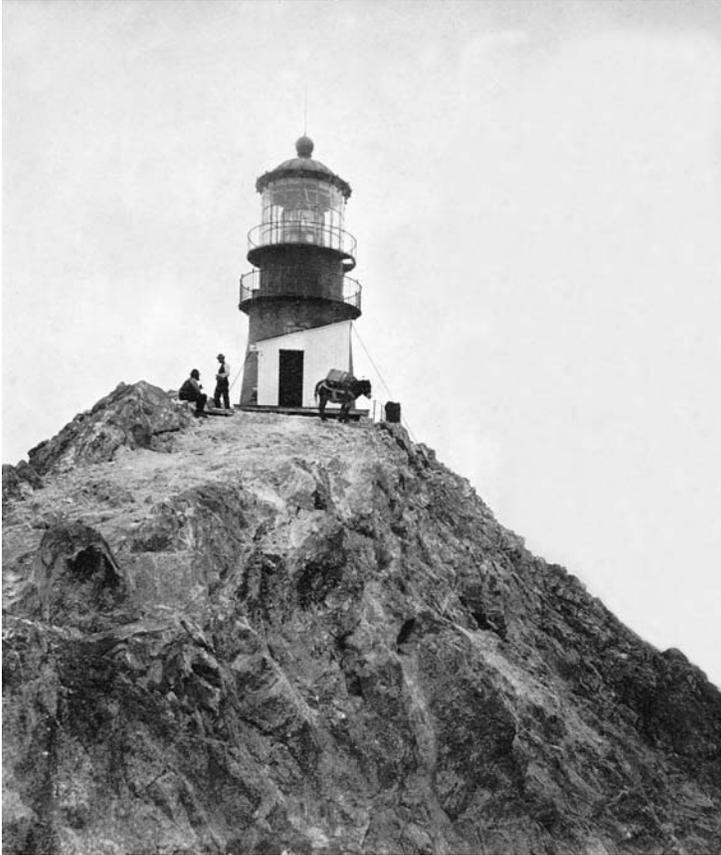
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What has this Light Witnessed?

Imagine you are on Southeast Farallon Island and you are watching the ships coming from the sea and entering San Francisco Bay. Everything you need is with you on the island where you and your family help keep the light aflame to help guide the ships safely into the Bay. The islands are twenty-six miles offshore (from the land) so it is not easy to get to the mainland.

- What do you think it would be like to live here?
- How would the weather affect how you live?
- How often would you be able to see your friends?
- What would you do to entertain yourself?
- What would happen if you got very sick?

Setting the Stage: What has this Light Witnessed?

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The light at the Southeast Farallon Island watched over ships as they passed it for more than a century. It greeted the tall clipper ships and side-paddle steamers in the 1850s, carrying passengers eager for a new life in California. It guided schooners bringing lumber to build new cities and grain ships setting sail for Europe by way of Cape Horn. It bade farewell to ships of war carrying young Americans to battle in the Pacific. This light witnessed the voyages that built the port and city of San Francisco.

The Farallon Lighthouse, completed in 1855, stood on a hill 339 feet high on the southernmost and largest island of the chain. The island lies 26 miles west of the Golden Gate. By the 1890s four families lived on the island, and the ten children used the old stone keepers house as a school. Their only contact with the outside world was a visit from the steam tender every three months and an occasional hail from a passing fisherman or tugboat. The isolation and lack of medical care cost the lives of at least four island children. Life on this hard and lonely station was justified only by its essential service to navigation.

Additional Resources

The following web sites provide different views of the Farallon Islands' history. Use these sites for further research about the lighthouse and its keepers.

<http://www.footlooseforays.iohome.net/cgi-bin/Topic.pl?topic=53&public>

Written by Michael Ellis

http://www.sfgate.com/getoutside/1997/sep/fi_history.html

The San Francisco Chronicle written by Allison Hill

<http://www.geocities.com/farallonus/history.html>

Geocities

Map Challenges: What has this Light Witnessed?

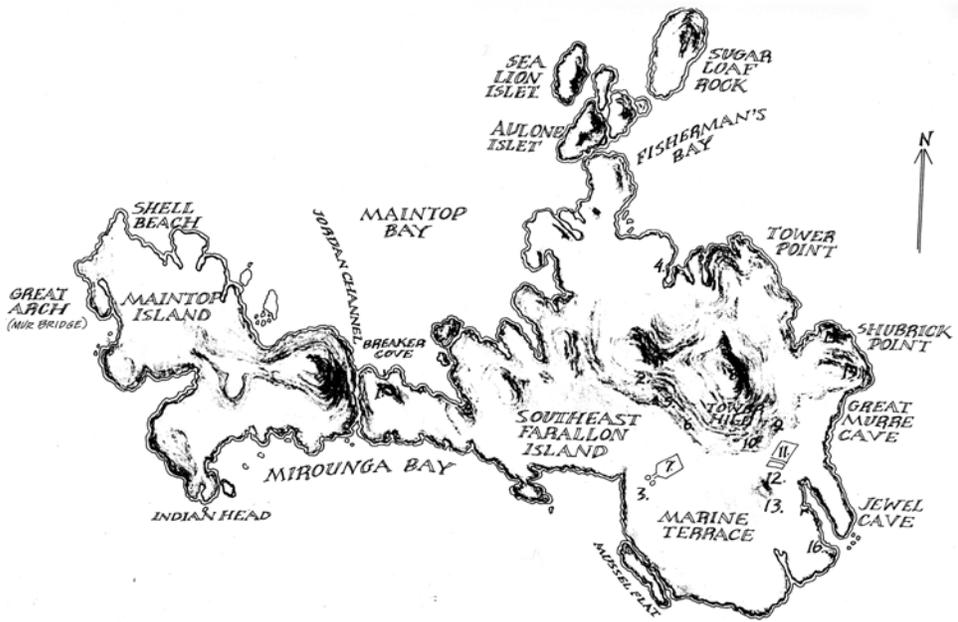
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Source: San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.
From *The Farallon Islands; Sentinels of the Golden Gate* by Peter White.

This map shows where the Farallon Islands are located in the Pacific Ocean 26 miles from San Francisco.

- Can you find Southeast Island where the families who took care of the lighthouse lived?



From *The Farallon Islands; Sentinels of the Golden Gate* by Peter White.

This map of the Southeast Farallon Island shows that the lighthouse was located on Tower Hill. To find it look north of Marine Terrace and west of Great Murre Cave.

Seaside Story: Mercedes and the Light House

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I am Mercedes Beeman. I live on one of the Farallon Islands 35 miles offshore from the San Francisco Bay. There are actually three islands, or three groups of mountain peaks jutting above the surface of the ocean. I am 10 years old in this year of 1899 and live on the island with my parents, William and Wilhelmina Beeman, and my sisters Virginia and Isabel. I once had an older brother, Royal Beeman. My father is the head lighthouse keeper on the Farallon Islands.

Being the daughter of a lighthouse keeper is a strange and interesting life. There are other families living here too. They are the families of the three assistant lighthouse keepers and a few other people. The Farallon Islands are located in the Pacific Ocean 26 miles southwest of the Golden Gate. The massive light on top of the tall tower shines brightly and is a beacon for the ships coming into the harbor from their long journeys at sea. When the fog settles over the ocean, our light and steam fog horn help people keep from crashing into the rocks along the shore. That light has saved the life of many a sailor. It is exciting to see the ships come in from the ocean. At first they are so small on the horizon, then they get larger and larger as they get nearer.

The lighthouse was built in 1852. The light was lit on January 1, 1856. It was the third lighthouse along the Pacific Coast. It is so much fun to wonder what cargo the ships are carrying and what exciting places they have been in the world before coming to San Francisco. A long time ago, in 1849, people came from all over the world to San Francisco. They went up to the hills to find gold. It was called the Gold Rush, but it was over in a few years when people found out it was really hard to find gold! Now in the year of 1899, most people make their money in trade, cargo, farming, and lumber.

Many ships come in and out of the harbor. They bring all kinds of goods from foreign lands and other parts of the United States of America. I should love to sail away on one of those ships someday.

Right now, I live on this little island and sometimes go to San Francisco with my parents. I play with my sisters and other friends.



Source: San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, 03.07.G2.01.
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We have a mule named Jack. He takes us up the hill to the lighthouse. It really is fun to ride on him. I know Jack likes all of us kids, but he liked Royal the best! Oh, how I miss my big brother, Royal. We played and fought day in and out just like all brothers and sisters. He was closest to my age.

My father is the head lighthouse keeper. He keeps a log of everything important that happens here. The lighthouse itself has a huge lens that flashes as it turns. This shines far out to sea. The enormous lamp in the lens is lit by whale oil. We store the oil in cans and then put it into the lamp-burning container.

The families make extra money by gathering the eggs from the murre birds that live here. Egg gathering all started with the Gold Rush in 1849. People

who came to San Francisco at that time wanted eggs for their breakfast, and the egg business started here with a man named Doc Robinson. He came to California to start a theatre company, but discovered more money was to be made by taking the eggs of the common murre. He plundered eggs from the murre birds that were nested at the Farallon Islands and sold them for \$1.75 a dozen. The Farallon Egg Company was soon formed and every May through July, ten to fifteen men gathered, packaged, shipped, and sold the eggs. During the early days 600,000 eggs were taken per year! That was a lot of eggs! Now the lighthouse families harvest the eggs.

These eggs are called Murre Eggs. I have one that I will always keep because of its beauty. Someday, I might travel across the ocean to discover many lands. I want to see the world when I grow up and someday leave this island.

There is a story about these Murre Eggs that I will tell you. This is about the famous Farallon egg war, which was fought on June 6, 1863. Before the lighthouse was built, Murre eggs could be found on the South east island. Then, a man by the name of Bat Shelter and his gang of 25 armed men tried to invade the Southeast Island because they wanted to take the egg business away from Doc Robinson who owned the Farallon Egg Company. After a 20 minute gun battle, five men lay wounded and one dead. Bat Shelter and his men were driven off the island.

In 1880, there was a big fight between the men from the Farallon Egg Company and the lighthouse keepers like my father. The United States Army arrived on the island shortly after the fight and asked the Egg Company to leave forever. The lighthouse keepers and their families have been gathering the eggs and selling them since. Let me give you some advice. Never take the eggs of the tufted puffin! A puffin can bite a finger to the bone. I once saw a puffin bite my friend's finger clean off!

Aside from the fun of gathering murre eggs and playing with your friends, life on the Farallon Islands is isolated and sometimes dangerous. When something goes wrong, it can be very, very bad. We are so far away from San Francisco. On a clear day, it is a long sail or row over those twenty-six miles; but on a stormy day, it is next to impossible. This great distance between the Farallon Islands and San Francisco proved to be great trouble for my family.

Last Christmas, poor Royal, my eldest brother, got very, very sick. We don't have a doctor who lives here. When we get sick, Mama has to tend to us. If she can't help, then we have to get in a boat and go the twenty-six miles through rough seas to San Francisco. Our life is hard here, we don't have running water and must rely on the rainwater we catch in barrels to drink, wash, and cook. Here is poor Royal's story.

It was Christmas day 1898 when Royal started to complain that he was feeling sick. He threw up until he was so weak he could hardly hold up his head. Mama tended to him all day and night. She even gave him some of Father's medicine called *Dover Powder*. Because it is made of ipecac and opium, *Dover Powder* usually cured everyone. The ipecac was used to make you vomit up anything bad in your stomach and the opium was to help ease any pain. But poor Royal just got sicker and sicker. He was in terrible pain, crying out and begging Mama to help. Mama was beside herself. The supply ship was not due for a week. There was no way to get to San Francisco. Mama knew that Royal needed a doctor. She ran out of ideas to help him.

Now to make matters worse, a huge storm came up. The wind was howling across the island. Waves were breaking on the rocks and spraying 30 feet in the air. We could hardly see the light on top of the lighthouse. This was a horrible turn of events. It was almost like the wind and water wanted to keep us here. Mama got desperate. She begged Papa to do something. Finally Papa got the assistant lighthouse keeper out of his house and the two men launched a 14-foot rowboat into the mighty Pacific Ocean. The waves were fierce. The rain was pelting down hard.

Mama insisted on going and I begged Papa to let me go too. But he would not let me. "Mercedes, stay behind and help with your sister," Papa said. Then Papa and Mr. Engelbrecht, First Assistant Keeper got the boat ready. Papa put down in his log that morning that conditions were "strong wind . . . very rough." Mama had to take the baby, Isabel, since she was still nursing and needed to be with Mama all of the time. My younger sister, Virginia, and I were left with the first assistant keeper's wife here on the island.

I remember running with Mama to the boat. She was following Papa and Mr. Engelbrecht who carried Royal. I carried out the baby Isabel, who was all wrapped up in warm cloth. The men laid Royal out on a mattress they put in the bottom of the boat. Mama got into the little boat and I handed her the

baby. The rain was running down Mama's face and mine. We couldn't tell the rain from our tears. I was so afraid it would be the last time I saw my parents and brother. I remember watching Papa grab the oars and push the little boat off. I saw him and Mr. Englebrecht strain under the pull of the oars as they rowed into the huge swells that were in the cove. The rain was running down the back of their rain hats. Mama was clutching the baby and Royal at the same time. She did manage to look back at me and wave good-bye. I remember standing on the shore, dripping wet, shivering from the cold and watching the little boat climb up the first huge, 30-foot swell it met just beyond the cove. Tears mixed with rain running down my face. And so they rowed off to San Francisco - a tiny boat in a big ocean with waves so high they were lost from sight just a short way from the shore.

Mama told the rest of the story to me when she returned. It turned out that the trip over to the mainland was really wet and difficult. Mama said that a rainsquall came up and that rain drops as big as ten-cent pieces beat down on them. Then it began to hail. Pellets of ice were pounding the little boat something fierce. The sea was washing in so quickly that she had to bail it out using a small bucket. They couldn't tell if the water from the rain and hail or the water from the ocean waves crashing over the bow would sink the boat first. They were all wet and shivering. Royal was crying out in pain. The baby was wailing. Mama was begging God for help.

Mama said, "Finally at half past three o'clock we had covered 14 miles of open sea to the light ship, and at four o'clock Pilot Boat No. 11, *The America*, stopped and took us on board. God had watched over us."

The pilot boat turned and set a course for San Francisco and by that night, Royal was with a doctor. In fact a whole team of doctors was called to help him. But even then, poor Royal died on January 3, 1899. It was a horrible shock to all of us.



The Beeman family, left to right: Mercedes, William, Isabel, Wilhelmina and Virginia. Taken in 1899, shortly after the death of Royal Beeman. Courtesy of Sally Beeman-Terry

From *The Farallon Islands; Sentinels of the Golden Gate* by Peter White.

We do miss Royal so much. I still remember being on the mule, Jack, riding behind Royal, proud as can be. Even with all of the hardships, I still love this island and the lighthouse. It is my home.

- How is your life today different from Mercedes and her family?
- What do you think the boat trip from the Farallon Islands to San Francisco was like for Royal that night?
- What does your family do today in a medical emergency? How does this differ from the experiences of the Beeman family?

Maritime Artifacts: What has this Light Witnessed?

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Source: San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, SAFR 19609. Warning: this material may be protected by copyright law.

The Farallons lens, designed and built in Paris by Henri Lepaute, came to San Francisco in 1854 aboard a French ship. Installed in the metal and glass lamp house, the lens rotated around a fixed lamp, making one revolution every eight minutes. Prisms, arranged on eight sides, each with a central bulls-eye, focused and magnified the flame to a 280,000 candlepower beam visible for a distance of twenty-six miles. The lens produced a flash of light 4.5 seconds long as each bull-eye rotated to face the observer, followed by 55.5 seconds of darkness. The Farallons Light, besides serving as a guidepost into the Bay, marked a fearsome hazard to shipping. Nine ships have been lost on the rocks, most in fog too thick for the light to penetrate. The first-order lens was replaced in 1961 by a more modern electric aerobeacon.



Source: San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, SAFR 19609.
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Clockworks Mechanism for Light Lens

This elegant mechanism rotated the lens of the lighthouse. The cogwheel meshed with the cast iron drive wheel to move it. A 350 pound weight hanging from a cord moved from the top of the lighthouse to the bottom to power the machine. A person called a keeper cranked the weight back up every four and one-half hours.

Standards Based Activity: What has this Light Witnessed?

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Shape Poem

Activity Process and Outcome

Students read the lighthouse story and research further information about the history of the Farallon Island Lighthouse using material from the suggested web sites. Students brainstorm lighthouse words that describe the lighthouse. Students sketch a simple line drawing of a lighthouse and fill in words to form a poem in the shape of a lighthouse.

Activity Objective

Students will discover the history of the Farallon Lighthouse and create a poem that describes their impressions of this lighthouse.

Instruction

1. Print and distribute the story, *Mercedes and the Lighthouse*, for students to read.
2. Suggest the following web sites to read for further research on the Farallon Island history.

<http://www.footlooseforays.iohome.net/cgi-bin/Topic.pl?topic=53&public>

Written by Michael Ellis

http://www.sfgate.com/getoutside/1997/sep/fi_history.html

The San Francisco Chronicle written by Allison Hill

<http://www.geocities.com/farallonus/history.html>

Geocities

3. Ask students to each sketch a simple line drawing of a lighthouse on a piece of blank paper. Display pictures of the Farallon Island Lighthouse for students to use as a model.
4. Next, gather students together for a whole class brainstorming session.
5. Ask students to brainstorm any words that come to their mind about the lighthouse and stories about the history of the Farallon Island. As they

give you the words, write them down either on the whiteboard or on a large piece of paper at the front of the room.

6. Once there are a good number of words on the board or paper, circle the words that are highly descriptive and call them to the student's attention.
7. Next, draw three columns on the whiteboard or paper. Title this The Farallon Island Lighthouse and Environment. Label the three columns: Visual words, Sound Words, and Feeling Words (about how the characters in the story felt). (See sample)
8. Ask students to find words from the original brainstorm list that fit in the three categories. Ask students to add more of their own ideas. As students dictate the words place them in the appropriate column. (If students are able, ask them to indicate which column.)
 * Challenging Extension: Ask students to generate then and now ideas that indicate historical concepts.
9. Students use the words in the three columns to generate a poem about the Farallon Island Lighthouse. They write their ideas along the lines of their lighthouse sketches. (See sample). They create a shape poem. Display student shape poems in an appropriate place.
10. Technology Extension:
 Students scan their poems to create digital files. They create a class slide show using *PowerPoint* or *HyperStudio*.

Lighthouse Description Words

Visual	Auditory	Feeling
Tall Bright Light	Waves crashing Seagulls calling	Isolated Afraid

Sample Shape Poem
The Lighthouse with Open Arms



Quick Assessment

Check poems for structure (written in the shape of a sketched lighthouse).
Also check for inclusion of descriptive visual, sound, and feeling words.

California State Content Standards for Public Schools

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The following standards correlate to this unit.

Lighthouse Family

HISTORY STANDARDS

Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills Grades K-5

Chronological and Spatial Thinking

1. Students place key events and people of the historical era they are studying in a chronological sequence and within a spatial context; they interpret time lines.
2. Students correctly apply terms related to time, including *past, present, future, decade, century, and generation*.
3. Students explain how the present is connected to the past, identifying both similarities and differences between the two, and how some things change over time and some things stay the same.
4. Students use map and globe skills to determine the absolute locations of places and interpret information available through a map's or globe's legend, scale, and symbolic representations.
5. Students judge the significance of the relative location of a place (e.g., proximity to a harbor, on trade routes) and analyze how relative advantages or disadvantages can change over time.

Research, Evidence, and Point of View

1. Students differentiate between primary and secondary sources.
2. Students pose relevant questions about events they encounter in historical documents, eyewitness accounts, oral histories, letters, diaries, artifacts, photographs, maps, artworks, and architecture.
3. Students distinguish fact from fiction by comparing documentary sources on historical figures and events with fictionalized characters and events.

Historical Interpretation

1. Students summarize the key events of the era they are studying and explain the historical contexts of those events.
2. Students identify the human and physical characteristics of the places they are studying and explain how those features form the unique character of those places.

California: A Changing State Grade 4

- 4.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the physical and human geographic features that define places and regions in California.
 3. Explain and use the coordinate grid system of latitude and longitude to determine the absolute locations of places in California and on Earth.
 5. Identify the locations of the Pacific Ocean, rivers, valleys, and mountain passes, and explain their effects on the growth of towns.

- 4.3 Students explain the economic, social, and political life in California from the establishment of the Bear Flag Republic through the Mexican-American War, the Gold Rush, and the granting of statehood.
3. Analyze the effects of the Gold Rush on settlements, daily life, politics, and the physical environment (e.g., using biographies of John Sutter, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Louise Clapp).
- 4.4 Students explain how California became an agricultural and industrial power, tracing the transformation of the California economy and its political and cultural
4. Describe rapid American immigration, internal migration, settlement, and the growth of towns and cities (e.g., Los Angeles).

United States History and Geography: Making a New Nation Grade 5

LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Grades 4 and 5

2.0 Reading Comprehension (Focus on Informational Materials)

Students read and understand grade-level-appropriate material. They describe and connect the essential ideas, arguments, and perspectives of the text by using their knowledge of text structure, organization, and purpose. The selections in *Recommended Readings in Literature, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* illustrate the quality and complexity of the materials to be read by students. In addition, by grade eight, students read one million words annually on their own, including a good representation of grade-level-appropriate narrative and expository text (e.g., classic and contemporary literature, magazines, newspapers, online information). In grade five, students make progress toward this goal.

Structural Features of Informational Materials

- 2.1 Understand how text features (e.g., format, graphics, sequence, diagrams, illustrations, charts, maps) make information accessible and usable.
- 2.2 Analyze text that is organized in sequential or chronological order.

Comprehension and Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text

- 2.3 Discern main ideas and concepts presented in texts, identifying and assessing evidence that supports those ideas.
- 2.4 Draw inferences, conclusions, or generalizations about text and support them with textual evidence and prior knowledge.

Expository Critique

- 2.5 Distinguish facts, supported inferences, and opinions in text.